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ABSTRACT

A list of 100 books recommended for kindergarten use were reviewed and evaluated for elements of sexism and sex role stereotyping. Each book was carefully scanned and notations made on survey sheets. The story was checked to see if it was a boy or girl centered story, had an adult male or adult female character, male or female animal or inanimate object, and whether males and females were presented in stereotyped roles (females in aprons and in the house, males outside in traditional roles). The illustrations were very carefully scanned to see if there were more males, more females, or equal representation. The books were also evaluated to see if females or males were presented in unusual roles and whether the book gave equal treatment to both sexes and could be classified as truly nonsexist. A second collection of 25 selections from several children's book clubs were also evaluated in the same way. The findings, tabulated in six tables, clearly show that there is indeed a disparity in the treatment of the sexes in children's picture books. (CS)

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ELEMENTS OF SEXISM IN A SELECTED GROUP OF PICTURE BOOKS RECOMMENDED FOR KINDERGARTEN USE

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Introduction

Women's lib, sexism, male chauvinism, sexist and other such terms are flying thick and fast in today's society. Whatever the pros and cons of such a Movement as the women's liberation movement, who would have thought it would sift down to children's literature creating a furor and clamor about such an innocent article as a picture book.

> In the world of children's reading books; little boys are still made of frogs and snails and puppy dog tails, and little girls remain sugar and spice and everything nice. But this traditional view of the sexes in elementary schoolbooks is being challenged by a group of serious-minded mothers from Princeton, N.J.
>
> They call themselves Women on Words and Images (WOWI), and at first glance, surrounded by their children, dogs and husbands, they do not appear much different from the stereotypical images they are attacking. But their work--a study of 2760 stories in 134 schoolbooks by 14 different publishers--has turned a core group of six women into professional campaigners to revise the readers of this country's schoolchildren in primary grades.
>
> The women firmly believe that the textbooks in use now hurt all young readers, both boys and girls. Mrs. Rogie Bender, mother of two boys and two girls, says, "Girls are constantly insulted in these books by being compared unfavorably to boys. And the texts are bad for my sons, too. Little boys are always being brave, choking back tears, and often receive praise for doing stupid things. (1:6-7)"

The women of WOWI have published their findings (2) and have prepared a slide show to be rented and shown to groups to illustrate these findings.

> "Specialists in childrens books have in recent years been euphoric over the advances made in books for children. While there are always a few unexpected clinkers to stumble over, the general quality is high. Books are available on a variety of topics undreamed of five years ago. Technological advances in printing

> have made it possible, quickly and cheaply, to produce visually sophisticated books, which delight both the artist and the child who reads or looks at them. It is probably safe to say that more children are in contact with better books than ever before." (3:236)
>
> "Yet, suddenly, with an abrasive intensity which staggers us, we are made aware that much of this literature is considered dross. Those of us involved---are indicted for a sin of commission on the children to whom we are responsible. The charge? Sexism - the portrayal of women in undesirable and demeaning roles. Spokeswomen for liberation groups tell us emphatically that children are exposed to books which mold their ideas of women's roles, albeit unconsciously, so that little girls grow up with the view of themselves as second class citizens, destined only for motherhood. (3:236)"

We are all aware I think that women make up 52% or better of the population of this country, 42% of these women work outside of the home and about 40% of these are working in professional level jobs (3). One wonders if all this furor is justified. Surely where there is so much smoke there must be some fire.

> "Is the portrayal of females in children's books sexist? That is, are girls and women assigned only traditional female roles and personalities? And when the female foot fails to fit that often too-tight shoe, is the girl or woman then seen as an unfortunate, troubled human being?
>
> These questions were the basis of a group effort to scrutinize some of the more highly praised children's books. In our view, a non-sexist portrayal would offer the girl reader a positive image of woman's physical, emotional, and intellectual potential - one that would encourage her to reach her own full personhood, free of traditionally imposed limitations. (4:235)"

CHAPTER I

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Far be it from us to personally be associated with the women's liberation movement, but we are deeply concerned about young children and what we do to them in the process of "educating" them.

> "Sex-role socialization constitutes one of the most important learning experiences for the young child. By the time the child enters kindergarten, he or she is able to make sex-role distinctions and express sex-role preferences. Boys already identify with masculine roles and girls with feminine roles (Brown 1956). They also learn the appropriate behavior for boys and girls and men and women. Hartly (1960) reports that, by the time they are four, children realize that the primary feminine role is housekeeping, while the primary masculine role is wage earning. (4:1125)"
>
> "In addition to learning sex-role identification and sex-role expectations, boys and girls are socialized to accept societys definition of the relative worth of each of the sexes and to assume the personality characteristics that are "typical" of each sex. With regard to relative status, they learn boys are more highly valued than girls. (4:1125)"

Knowing this it behooves those who work with young children to take a close look at the curricula and at the methods used to convey the objectives set forth in that curricula. What is the single, most often used vehicle to introduce, reinforce or get across an idea to young children in nursery school and kindergarten? Perhaps nothing else is so widely used as that "innocent" - the picture book.

> "Picture books play an important role in the early sex-role socialization because they are a vehicle

> for the presentation of societal values to the young child. Through books, children learn about the world outside of their immediate environment. They learn about what boys and girls do, say, and feel. They learn about what is right and wrong, and they learn what is expected of children their age. In addition books provide children with role models - images of what they can and should be like when they grow up. (5:1126)"
>
> "Children's books reflect cultural values and are an important instrument for persuading children to accept those values. They also contain role prescriptions which encourage children to accept those values. (5:1126)"

Preschool children "read" or look at the same picture books over and over again at a time when all these processes of socialization and development of sexual identities are taking place. They are read over and over to the children when they are most impressionable and before school, teachers and peers become important as socialization influences. This being so it is necessary for those of us who work with young children to scrutinize carefully the materials we choose and use. Just because a reference book gives a recommended list of "good books" we must not take the bait, hook, line, and sinker - without some investigation on our own.

There have been several studies of children's books done such as the study of the Caldecott Winners (5); one hundred and fifty-four books (3); textbooks (1 and 2) and possibly others. For this study the author chose the list recommended in a widely used

kindergarten text or reference book (6) to evaluate for elements of sexims present in the books, thinking that this textbook possibly would be extensively used by kindergarten teachers.

CHAPTER II

METHOD USED IN STUDY

The list of books (Appendix I) was reviewed and poetry eliminated on the assumption, however filmsy, that the illustrations would be more limited by content. The books were then scanned page by page for visual effect since this characteristic would have more effect on the nursery school-kindergarten child who could not read. References to "he" and "she" in the text would not have as much effect on the child using the books visually. However, this factor was not entirely overlooked as it would be a contributing factor is the book were read to the child, though in some instances the teacher could modify the text somewhat if she wished.

Each book was carefully scanned and notations made on survey sheets (Appendix II). The story was checked to see if it was a boy or girl centered story: had an adult male or adult female character: male or female animal or inanimate object story: and whether males and females were presented in stereotyped roles; females in aprons and in the house; males outside in traditional roles. The illustrations were very carefully scanned to see if there were more males, more females or equal representation in them. The author felt that children might notice these differences more than adults for they learn much in addition to what

we teach or in spite of what we teach through materials presented to them.

The books were also evaluated for females or males presented in unusual roles and whether the book gave equal treatment to both sexes and could be classified as truly non-sexist.

Thinking of another source of picture books often used by young children, the author picked at random from her collection and the collection of her grandchildren, twenty-five recent selections from several children's book clubs and evaluated these as group two in the study by the same method as group one.

The survey of group one was made principally in Abilene Public Library, which has an unusually good children's library for a city of 90,000-120,000 population. It is a resource center with Texas State Libraries and operates a widely used bookmobile service to all parts of the city and surrounding county. Most of the books on the list were available; hence would be available to teachers and children alike in Taylor County.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study seems to substantiate what the other studies have found, that there is indeed a disparity in the treatment of the sexes in children's picture books. No doubt these findings would mean celebration in the Woman's Liberation Movement headquarters but that is not the feeling that these findings give to us. It is a sad commentary on our society's value system and we believe it is just as damaging to our male children as to our female children.

The findings have been tabulated in six tables which at a glance show the findings.

One significant fact which should be pointed out, however, is that among the books in these two groups, the group recommended in the kindergarten textbook made a much better showing overall than the group which comes into our homes without any choice on our part. In group one the illustrations predominately male over female were 3 to 1 whereas in group two the ratio was 9 to 1. Thirty percent of the stories were boy-centered in group one and forty percent in group two. In group two only eight percent were judged non-sexist, whereas 34% were judged non-sexist in group one. We realize, of course, that these findings might vary when done by another researcher, for no two people see things exactly the same

but an honest effort was made to be very careful in these evaluations and sincerely believe the errors in judgment would be in favor of authors and illustrators rather than against them.

Several authors made very good showings such as Marie Ets, Marjorie Flack, Alice Goudey, Robert McCloskey, Taro Yashima, and Marjorie Brown.

TABLE I

Total Books Examined	100
Number Different Authors	73
Number Different Publishers	29

TABLE II

	Number of Instances	
	Group I	Group II
Boy Centered Stories	23	10
Girl Centered Stories	12	1
Male Animal Story	15	13
Female Animal Story	6	2
Non-Sexist or Equal Treatment	26	2

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TABLE III

	Number of Instances	
	Group I	Group II
Adult Male Character	15	5
Adult Female Character	13	1
Stereotype Adult Roles	16	9
Male in Unusual Role	2	1
Female in Unusual Role	1	2

TABLE IV

	Number of Instances	
	Group I	Group II
Illustrations Predominately Male	31	18
Illustrations Predominately Female	11	2

TABLE V

GROUP I

	Percentage Total
Boy Centered Stories	30%
Girl Centered Stories	16%
Male Animal Stories	20%
Female Animal Stories	8%
Non-Sexist	34%

TABLE VI

GROUP II

	Percentage Total
Boy Centered Stories	40%
Girl Centered Stories	4%
Male Animal Stories	52%
Female Animal Stories	8%
Non-Sexist	8%

CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Just as in other studies of this type we find that picture books do not truly depict roles as they are assumed today; do not show true spread in population and do not give a really accurate portrayal of life today in our society.

> "The books seldom show men involved in the household tasks many of them perform today, as a result of having a working wife. -------women are not depicted in the rich variety of professional roles in which they are engaged today. ------This seems especially crucial in picture books which are used at a time when children are extremely impressionable and learning much in the way of both facts and attitudes. Attitudes would be more positive if the facts presented through picture books were more reflective of the nature of our society today. (3:241)"

What do we want in picture books or indeed any book for children. The Feminists on children's literature have put it much better than this author can state it.

> "Many women have to - or simply prefer to - earn a living. Can't we encourage girls to find satisfaction and fulfillment in work, and lay forever the suspicion that work outside the home for a woman is primarily proof of her inability to love a man, or to land a sufficiently lucrative one?
>
> Margaret Mead has written that "man is unsexed by failure, woman by success." That's another brutal truth we'd like to see changed. And while we're about it, let's not overlook the fact that boys, too, are denigrated and cramped by sexism. Our current rigid role definitions

require that a boy be all that a girl should not be: unafraid, competent at "male" jobs, strong. A weeping boy is a "sissy." Words like "sissy"--and "hero," too--should be dissected and exposed for the inhuman demands they make on growing boys. Children's books could help.

And when, as must sometimes happen if books portray real life, there is an overcontrolling or too-bossy woman, she should not be made a fool or villain. A little understanding--of her problem, her frustration at not being allowed to play an equal role in her family or her world, and her consequent misuse of energy to project her ideas and ego through the lives of others--is long overdue.

How about books showing more divorced and single-parent families? And, for heaven's sake, every divorced or widowed mother does not solve her problems through remarriage--or even wish to do so.

There is also the question of language. No more automatic use of "he" to mean "child," or "mankind" to mean humankind." If at first the alternatives seem forced--and they will--they won't sound that way for long.

Despite our criticism of socially assigned roles, we don't mean to diminish or ignore the mother or housewife. She is often a strong, wonderfully rich human being. Her role can be vital, and sometimes she finds satisfaction in it. But let's not insist on that as her role. Men can also cope skillfully with household tasks--and not necessarily look for a woman or daughter to take them off the hook. (4:236)"

Most of the furor over the differences in sexual representation is from the women's liberation standpoint. As the mother of sons and grandmother of seven pre-school age boys it seems that this situation is infinitely more damaging to the males and in the long run chances for happy adult relationships with both sexes are endangered. Some of the reasons one sees to substantiate this thinking are:

> "Most of the women in picture books have status by virtue of their relationships to specific men---------American preference for creativeness and curiosity in boys and neatness and passivity in girls. -------Children find it easier to identify with less differentiated and less stereotyped parental role models. ------rigid sex role distinctions may actually be harmful to the normal personality development of the child. -----picture books could also present less stereotyped and less rigid definition of male roles by encouraging boys to express their emotions as well as their intellect. Books might show little boys crying; playing with stuffed toys and dolls, and helping in the house. (5:1146-1147)"

Why do we have to continue to teach our little boys "that boys don't cry" forever condemning them to ulcers and whatever; that it is not manly to help around the house when they actually want to do these things. Are there any good books available to help us combat the effects of such rigid sex role determination? Fortunately there are already some good books available. The Caldecott Medal books as a whole score much better than other groups toward non-sexism. (5:1127) A very recent publication and one which is very good for young boys in breaking down such rigid sex roles is William's Doll Illus. by William Pene DuBois. It was nominated for the Caldecott Award for 1973 but did not win. Other books which will help reduce the "Miss Muffet" syndrome are listed in a bibliography; Little Miss Muffet Fights Book (7) and in an annotated bibliography "Reducing the 'Miss Muffet Syndrome." (8)

"The issue in equality is not that women must become 'like men,' or that men must become 'like women,' particularly not in imitating the other's worst qualities! There is nothing to be gained if women going into politics become warlike, or men moving into relationships become weak or dependent. 'Equality doesn't mean that we are going to give up whatever turns out to be our uniqueness as males and females.

What equality of the sexes really means, is a genuine interdependence, a doing away with the centuries-old 'battle of the sexes' which centers around male dominance and female submission. This is all many women today are really asking for.

Most of us find it hard to imagine how we will be able to remain different if we eliminate rigid female and male role and behavior differences. I believe that as females and males, we enjoy our 'difference' enough that we will always find ways to enhance it, to make ourselves attractive to each other.

Men are used to women being a certain way, staying in a certain place, letting men's interests come first, letting men have their own way. Most men probably won't move over without a push from women. Being dominant, though burdensome, has its satisfactions. The different - but - equal philosophy simply says that where merit and opportunity are concerned a meeting in the middle is the only way we can be fully human together. The 'middle' is the place where both men and women can get their needs met, individually and together, without one sex always dominating and the other giving way. By meeting in the middle we can love and work together. (10)"

Stories have always been the storehouse of man's knowledge, wisdom, cultural values and myths. They have also been the vehicle through which fantasy, imagination, creativity have been stimulated. Books could develop this wonderful quality of imagination and achievement in all children. Books can be very important in implementation of the growing demand for both boys

girls to have a real and full opportunity to develop to the fullest their wonderful human potential.

APPENDIX I

Kathy and the Big Snow—Virginia Burton
I Like Winter—Lois Lenski
Big Tracks, Little Tracks—Franklyn Branley
Josie and the Snow—Helen E. Buckley

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APPENDIX II

KEY TO BOOK RATINGS

1 - Boy or Girl Centered Story

2 - M - Adult Male Character
F - Adult Female Character

3 - Male or Female Animal or Inanimate Object Story

4 - More Males in Illustrations

5 - More Females in Illustrations

6 - Stereotyped Roles

7 - Unusual Role for Male or Female Character

8 - Non-sexist or Equal Treatment

Group I - List of Recommended Books pp. 61-64 Helping Young Children Learn - Pitcher et al

TITLE	AUTHOR	PUB. DATE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Little Tim & Brave Sea Captain	Ardizzone	Walch 1936	M	M		X				
2. Three Billy Goats Gruff	Asbjorsen & Moe	Doubleday 1943			M					
3. The Paper Flower Tree	Azer	Harcourt 1962	F	M						X
4. Madeline's Rescue	Bemelmans	Viking 1953	F	F			X			
5. Big Tracks Little Trucks	Branley	Crowell 1960				X				
6. Mickey's Magnet	Branley	Crowell 1956	M			X				
7. Red Umbrella	Bright	Morrow 1959	F				X			
8. Stone Soup	Brown	Scribness 1947		M		X		X		
9. Katy & the Big Snow	Burton	H M 1943			F					
10. Where's the Bunny	Carroll	Walch 1962			M					X
11. Pocketful of Cricket	Caudill	HRW 1964	M	F				X		
12. Don't Count Your Chickens	D'Aulaine	Doubleday 1943		F			X			
13. In the Forest	Ets	Viking 1944	M							X
14. Just Me	Ets	Viking 1965	M							X
15. Play With Me	Ets	Viking 1955	F				X			
16. Angus and the Cat	Flock	Doubleday 1931			M & F					X
17. Angus and the Ducks	Flock	Doubleday 1930			M					X
18. Ask Mr. Bear	Flock	MacMillan 1932	M	F		X				

Group I - List of Recommended Books pp. 61-64 (Continued)

Helping Young Children Learn - Pitcher et al

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUB. DATE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
19.	Tim Tadpole and the Great Bullfrog	Flock	Doubleday 1934			M	X				
20.	House That Jack Built	Galdone	McGraw 1961	M			X				
21.	Butterfly Time	Goudey	Scribner 1964			M					X
22.	Day We Saw the Sun Come Up	Goudey	Scribner 1951	M	F	M			X		
23.	Curious George	Rey	H M 1941		M	M	X				
24.	Curious George	Rey	H M 1963		M	M	X				
25.	Heavy is the Hippotamus	Sichlein	Scott 1954	M			X				
26.	Seeds & More Seeds	Selsam	Harper 1959	M	M		X				
27.	Terry and the Caterpillars	Selsam	Harper 1962	F	F				X		
28.	Where the Wild Things Are	Sendak	Harper 1963	M	F		X				
29.	And to Think I Saw It On Mulberry St.	Suess	Vanguard 1937	M			X				
30.	Horton Hatches the Egg	Suess	Random 1940		M	M	X			M	
31.	Yertle the Turtle	Suess	Random 1958			M	X				
32.	Late Cuckoo	Slobodkin	Vanguard 1962		M		X				
33.	Catch a Crickett	Stevens	Young Scott 196	M			X				
34.	Follow the Wind	Tresselt	Lothrop Lee 1950								
35.	Hi Mister Robin	Tresselt	Lothrop Lee 1950	M			X		X		
36.	Hide & Seek Fog	Tresselt	Lothrop Lee 1965		M		X		X		

Group I - List of Recommended Books pp. 61-64 (Continued)

Helping Young Children Learn - Pitch[illegible] et al

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUB. DATE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
37.	Rain Drop Splash	Tresselt	Lothrop Lee 1946								X
38.	Sun Up	Tresselt	Lothrop Lee 1949	M	M		X				
39.	White Snow Bright Snow	Tresselt	Lothrop Lee 1956		M		X		X		
40.	Wake Up Farm	Tresselt	Lothrop Lee	M	M						
41.	Storm Book - Zoloton		Harper 1952	M	F				X		
42.	My Garden Grows	Watson	Viking 1962								X
43.	UP Above and Down Below	Webber	Watts 1963								X
44.	Crow Boy	Yashima	Viking 1955	M			X			M	
45.	Umbrella	Yashima	Viking 1958	F	M			X			
46.	Plenty to Watch	Yashima	Viking 1954								X
47.	Houses From the Sea	Goudey	Scribner 1959								X
48.	Big Snow	Hades	MacMillan 1948		M	M	X		X		
49.	Snowy Day	Keats	Viking 1962	M			X		X		
50.	Whistle for Willie	Keats	Viking 1964	M	F		X		X		
51.	Let's Go Outdoors	Huntingdon	Doubleday 1939								X
52.	Brown Car Farm	Ipcar	Doubleday 1959								X
53.	Where's Wallace	Knight	Harper 1964		M	M	X		X		
54.	The Very Little Boy	Knasilovsky	Doubleday 1953	M	F		X				

Group I - List of Recommended Books pp. 61-64 (Continued)

Helping Young Children Learn - Pitcher et al

TITLE	AUTHOR	PUB. DATE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
55. The Very Little Girl	Knasilovsky	Doubleday 1953	F				X	X		
56. Which Horse is William	Kuskin	Harper 1953	M	F				X		
57. Who Goes There	Lathrop	MacMillan 1935			M	X				
58. The Tomten	Lindgren	1961 Coward McCann	M			X				
59. Tall Grass Zoo	Lubell	Rand 1960								X
60. Whistle for the Train	Brown (MacDonald)	Doubleday 1956								X
61. Pair of Red Clogs	Matsuno	World 1960	F	F			X			
62. Time of Wonder	McCloskey	Viking 1957								X
63. One Snail and Me	McLeod	Little Brown 1961	F							X
64. Munari's A B C	Munari	World 1960								X
65. Josephina February	Ness	Scribners 1963	F				X			
66. Harry the Dirty Dog	Graham	Harper Row 1956			M	X			F	
67. I Like Butterflies	Conklin	Holiday House 1960								X
Additional Books to Make 75 (random selection)										
68. Goodnight Moon	Brown	Harper 1947								X
69. How to Lose Your Lunch Money	White	Ritchie 1970								X
70. Impossible Possum	Conford	Little 1971			M	X		X		
71. Spectacles	Raskin	Atheneum 1968	F	F			X			

Group I - List of Recommended Books pp. 61-64 (Continued)

Helping Young Children Learn - Pitcher et al

TITLE	AUTHOR	PUB. DATE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
72. Numbers of Things	Oxenbury	Watts 1968								
73. Rosa Too Little	Felt	Doubleday 1950	F				X	X		
74. Katy No Pocket	Payne	H M 1944			F		X			
75. Farewell to Shady Glen	Peet				M					
76. Swimny	Lionni									

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Group II - Recent Childrens Book Club Selections (random selection)

TITLE	AUTHOR	PUB. DATE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Andrew Henry's Meadow	Burns	1965 Coward McCann	M			X		X		
2. Monkey & Crocodile	Galdone	Seabury 1969			M					X
3. Laughing Dragon	Mahood	Scribner 1970		M	M	X		X		
4. Turtle's Flying Lesson	Massie	Zerox 1973			M	X				
5. Duck Duck	Miller	Holiday House 1971		M		X		F	M	
6. Curious Geo. Flies a Kite	Rey	1958 Houghton Mifflin		M	M	X		F		
7. Big Max	Platt	Harper Row 1965		M	M	X				
8. Danny the Dinosaur	Hoff	Harper Row 1958	M		M	X				
9. Julius	Hoff	Harper Row 1959	M		M	X				
10. Fire Cat	Averill	Harper Row 1960		F	M	X				
11. Sammy the Seal	Hoff	Harper Row 1959			M			F		
12. What's in the Dark	Memling	Parent's Mag. 1971	M			X				
13. Little Bear's Visit	Minarik	Harper Row 1961			M	X				
14. Best Friends	Cohen	MacMillan 1971	M			X		F		
15. Mr. Biddle & the Birds	Anderson	Scribner 1971		M		X		F		
16. Bear's Water Picnic	Yeoman & Blake	MacMillan 1970			M					X
17. Here Comes Tagalong	Mallet	Parent's Mag. 1971	M			X		F		
18. Hurray for Captain Jane	Reavin	Parent's Mag. 1971	F				X		F	

Group II - Recent Childrens Book Club Selections (random selection)

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUB. DATE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
19.	One Kitten for Kim	Hall	1969 Addison Wesley	M		F	X			F	
20.	Me & My Flying Machine	Mayer	1971 Parent's Mag.	M			X				
21.	Gus the Friendly Ghost	Thayer	Morrow 1961	M							
22.	Mog the Forgetful Cat	Kerr	1972 Parent's Mag.			F		X	F		
23.	Cat in the Hat	Suess	1957 Random House	M & F		M					
24.	Bears in the Night	Berenstein	1971 Random House			M	X				
25.	The Secret Three	Myrick	Harper Row 1963	M			X				

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